

# What Is the Nature of the Human Person?

**PRO TIP**  
Download other grades for alternate activities!

## CONNECTIONS TO THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

CCC 355-357  
CCC 362-366

## MATERIALS

- ▶ Apple seeds, and/or a picture of a kitten
- ▶ [Who Are We?](#)
- ▶ [Levels of Being Chart](#)
- ▶ Bibles

## SUGGESTED TIME

40 minutes

# Teacher Background

The image and likeness of God imprinted on each human person are those two attributes that separate us from all other material creation: the intellect and free will. This is the source of our uniquely human powers and dignity.



## HOW DOES THIS LESSON HELP INOCULATE STUDENTS AGAINST GENDER IDEOLOGY?

Gender ideology considers the body a shell, or a tool for self-expression, that is ours to manipulate and control. But the truth is that we are a unity of body and soul..

## Activity

- Begin by showing your students an apple seed, and/or a picture of a kitten. Ask them what powers the apple seed has. What will it become? Will it produce oranges one day? Why not?
- Do the same demonstration with the picture of the kitten. What will this creature become as it grows? How do you know?
- Hold a quick discussion drawing out for students how they recognize that things grow according to their nature.
- Then read aloud the class from the essay on [Who Are We?](#) while students follow along.
- Next, distribute the [Levels of Being Chart](#). As a class, discuss the four levels as they ascend and become more complex the higher they get, pointing out the distinct breaks between the four levels.

### Who Are We?

As long as people have lived, we have asked the question, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?"

Another way of asking this is "What is my nature?" or "What is human nature?" This is an important question to ask, because if things or persons can only grow in certain ways depending on its nature. For example, an apple seed can sprout in the ground and grow into an apple tree. By the power of its nature, it produces apples. It cannot produce oranges because it is limited by its nature. Similarly, a kitten can grow into a cat, and a human being, but it can never become a bird and fly.

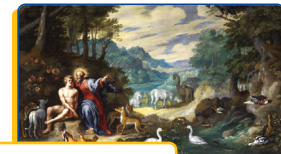
In the end, what a thing or person can do or become is determined and limited by its nature.

#### What is the nature of the human person?

Although all persons are unique, we all share a universal human nature. Humans are animals, but human nature is different from animal nature.

Human nature is a unity of body and soul, made in God's image and likeness, and deeply loved by Him. This nature, out of all creation, is something only human beings possess.

There is an order to creation. There is what could be called a hierarchy of being. There is a divide that separates each category in the hierarchy. Inanimate inanimate like rocks and minerals are at the lowest level of being. Then we have animals, or being, material. The lowest of these is plant life. There is



### Levels of Being

Directions: As a class, discuss E.F. Schumacher's four levels of being represented in the chart below. Then answer the questions that follow.

Human Person <i>material + life + consciousness + self-consciousness</i>	Animal + Person
Animals <i>material + life + consciousness</i>	
Plants <i>material + life</i>	
Minerals <i>material</i>	

- What do you notice about the relationship between each successive level?
- What do the yellow lines represent?

- F.** Discuss how this chart does not mean all plants are the same, or all animals are the same, or all people are the same! But the differences among one type of creation are never as great as the difference between types. For example: two rocks, no matter how dissimilar they are, are more like each other than they are like a plant. Even if you somehow found the two people in the world who were most different from each other, those two human beings would still be more similar to each other than they are to an animal.
- G.** Have students answer the questions on the handout, using their Bibles to record what they find in the Genesis verses. (You could have them do this part for homework if they do not have Bibles with them.)
- H.** See the Answer Key for ideas to prompt discussion.
- I.** Conclude by emphasizing that the human person's nature is the soul manifest in his or her body. If we are a unity of body and immortal soul, then we are our bodies. Our sexual identity cannot be separated from our bodies. Our bodies are an integral part of who we are, including our sexual identity.

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Inanimate materials like rocks and minerals are at the lowest level of being.

Then we have animate, or living, material. The lowest of these is plant life. There is



## STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

another divide, and higher up we have animal life. Finally, beyond the next divide, we have the highest life form: human life.

### The Powers of the Soul

The soul is what animates, or gives life, to material creation. Rocks and minerals (inanimate) do not have souls. But all living things (animate objects) have a soul. Plants have vegetative souls, animal souls, or rational, immortal (human) souls. All three kinds of souls have the basic powers of plants: to eat, grow, and reproduce.

Here the powers of the plant end; its nature is limited to these three activities.

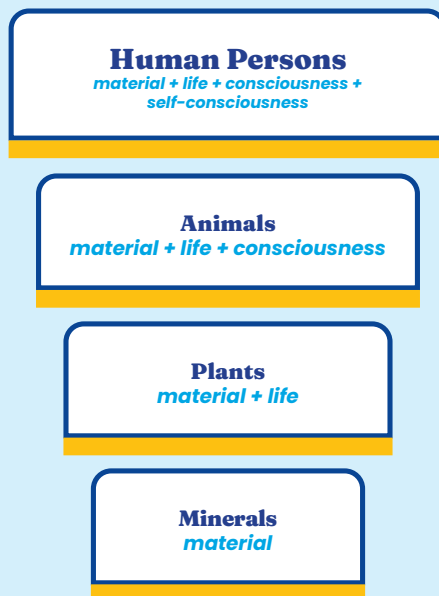
Animals and humans share many more powers in common, including the ability to move freely. (Plants cannot move freely, because they are rooted to the ground.)

There are two powers belonging to humans alone and those are intellect and free will: the very image of God imprinted on us all. The soul and the body are not two separate things, but two aspects of a single composite substance we know as the human person.

Our body is, as ancient philosophers have put it, our soul made manifest. That means our body makes our soul real in a way we can see and touch.

The image and likeness of God imprinted on each human person are those two attributes that separate us from all other material creation: the intellect and free will. Our dignity does not come to us externally from the approval or affirmation of others, but from our very nature, made in the image of God. This is the source of our uniquely-human powers and dignity.

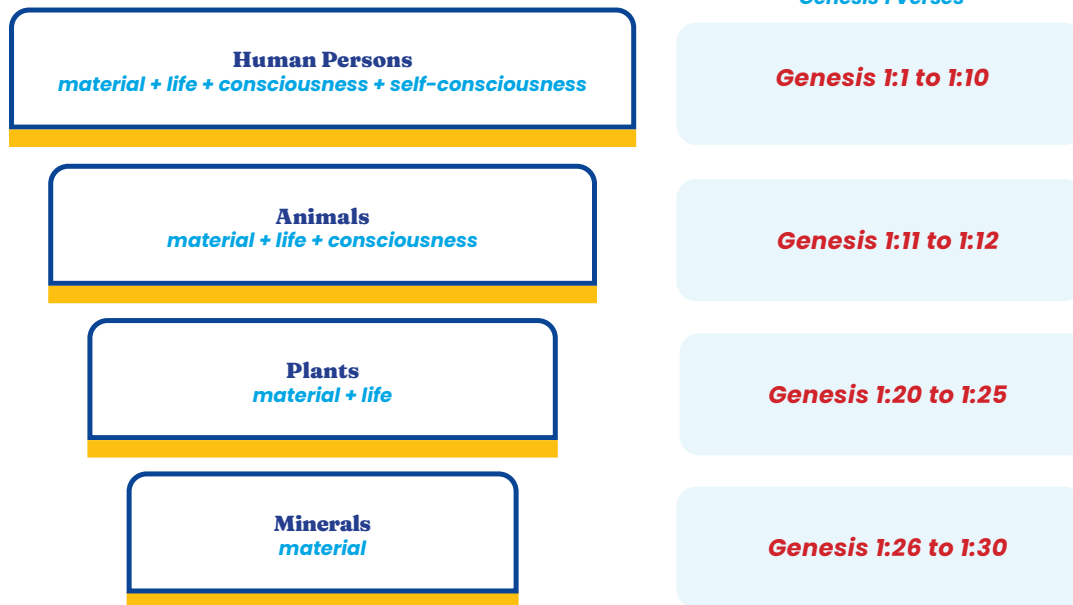
### E.F. Schumacher's Four "Levels of Being"





# Levels of Being

**Directions:** As a class, discuss E.F. Schumacher's four 'levels of being' represented in the chart below. Then answer the questions that follow.



- 1 What do you notice about the relationship between each successive level?

**Each successive level gets more complex as it ascends. Plants are more complex than minerals because they are alive. Animals are more complex than plants because they can move freely, and have consciousness. Humans are more complex than animals because we are self-conscious on top of every other similarity.**
- 2 What do the yellow lines represent?

**They represent an ontological divide across which no species can ascend, however, they can be crossed by descent. When a plant dies it becomes merely material, as do animals and humans. But can animals become plants? Can humans become animals? Not in the proper sense of those words. A plant can never become an animal and animals can never become human.**

## STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

- 3 How does the first creation account confirm this ascending hierarchical structure of being?

**God first formed the earth, heavens, and the seas. Then He said, "Let there be light." Then God formed the plants. For the well-being of the plants He made day, night, and the seasons, then the four rivers of water so that the plants might grow. Then He made the animals. Finally, God made man in His image and likeness and gave him dominion over all things, including naming the animals. On the seventh day, He rested. In this theological account of Genesis, we learn much about the hierarchical structure of God's creation.**

- 4 If our body is "our soul made manifest," then our bodies and souls are a unity. What does that mean for how we must regard our bodies, as part of God's creation? Is our sex (whether we are male or female) something we can control or change? If our sexual identity is a gift from God, how must we regard it?

**If we are a unity of body and immortal soul, then we are our bodies. Our sexual identity cannot be separated from our bodies. Our bodies are an integral part of who we are, including our sexual identity. As a gift, we must lovingly accept our body and care for it, as we are to loving care for all of creation.**

- 5 On the chart above, write the verse numbers from Genesis 1 next to the hierarchical level it describes.

**Minerals, Genesis 1:1 to 1:10**

**Plants, Genesis 1:11 to 1:12**

**Animals, Genesis 1:20 to 1:25**

**Humans, Genesis 1:26 to 1:3**

# **What Is the Nature of the Human Person?**



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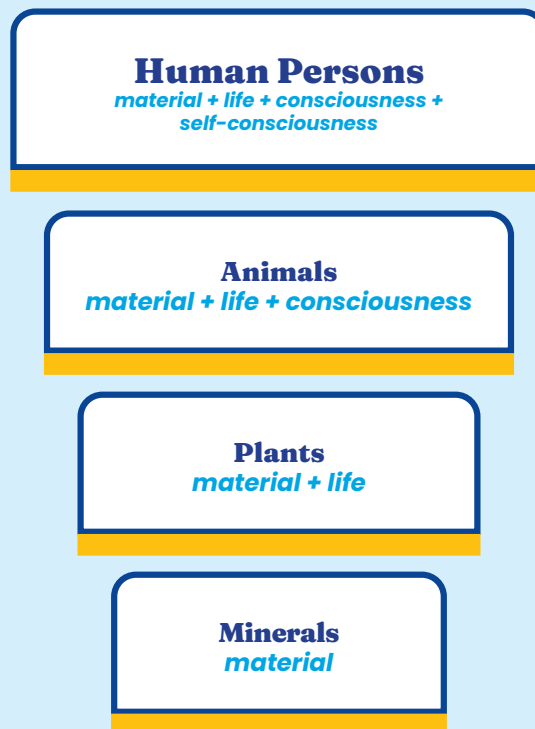
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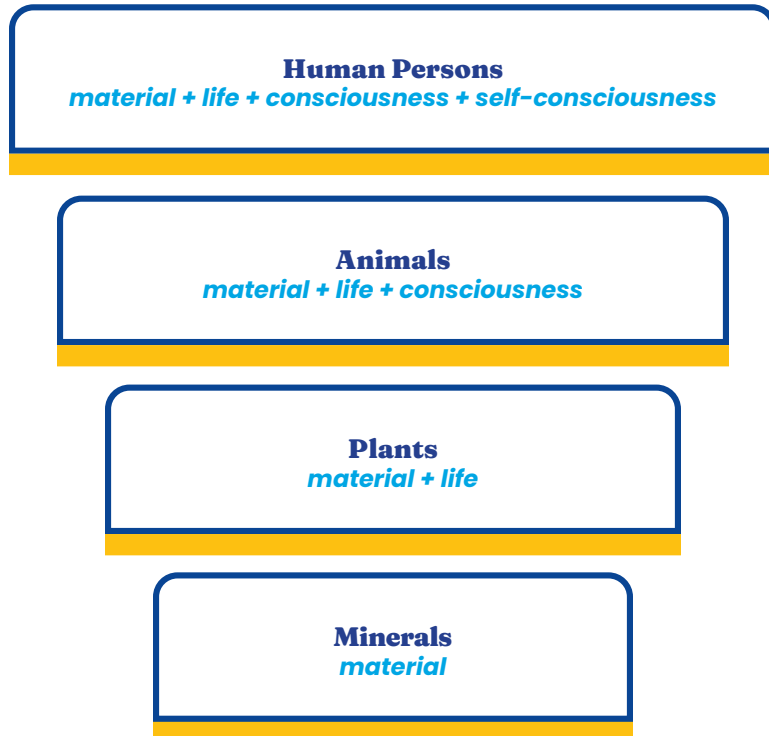
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## Genesis 1 Verses

Four light blue rounded rectangular boxes for writing Genesis 1 verses.

1 What do you notice about the relationship between each successive level?

Five horizontal lines for writing the answer to question 1.

2 What do the yellow lines represent?

Five horizontal lines for writing the answer to question 2.

3 How does the first creation account confirm this ascending hierarchical structure of being?

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